

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Program  
Foreign Service Spouse Series

LUCY BARNARD BRIGGS

Interviewed by: Patricia Squire

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Q: This is Pat Squire and I am at the home of Mrs. Ellis O. Briggs, Monday, October 16, 1989, in Hanover, New Hampshire. Before I start talking with Mrs. Briggs, I want to say that in 1951, my husband was assigned to Prague, Czechoslovakia, his first post as an FSO. Ambassador Briggs was our ambassador. Our visas were held up by the Czechs, so we went TDY to London. As we finally left for Prague, Anne Penfield said to me, a nervous first-time Foreign Service wife, "Don't worry Pat. Everything I know about the Foreign Service, I learned from Lucy Briggs." I couldn't agree more. So it is a great pleasure and honor for me to be interviewing Lucy Barnard Briggs, widow of one of our most outstanding career ambassadors, Ellis Ormsbee Briggs, and herself a truly outstanding Foreign Service wife.

Mrs. Briggs, you are important to our oral history program, not only as a greatly admired wife who taught us all who served under you so much, but you are important also because you joined the Foreign Service in its very early days as the wife of a very junior Foreign Service officer at his first post. Before we are finished, I hope we can talk about the early days in the Foreign Service, your experiences, and how you view the role of the Foreign Service wife.

We talked some yesterday about the fact that you had no training when you went into the Service.

BRIGGS: That's true. That's perfectly true. But I think I would like to start off and say something else first. I would like to say that Anne Penfield became a very warm and dear friend and that she added a great deal to the Service in every possible way. And that it was a joy to have a young couple like Chris and Pat Squire join us in Prague.

Q: Thank you.



BRIGGS: The role of the wife in the Foreign Service is a curious kind of a subject for me because when I married, the wife expected to be part of her husband's life. That was not always true in the lives of people whose husbands were businessmen and who found themselves either involved bringing up their children, or volunteers, or active in clubs. Some of them, occasionally, had professions which they followed. But on the whole, I think most wives, especially those who married into the Foreign Service, looked forward to a life that was going to be full of adventure and possibly excitement and possibly hardship, although I doubt if we thought of that very much.

It's hard to consider that things have changed as much as they seem to have changed at the moment. I remember in those days when a man's record was written up, his wife was also commented on. And if she added to his social position in a pleasant way, or if she was helpful in other ways, that was always put down. Or if she was something of a handicap, that was put down too. I did draw the conclusion over the years that a really good man was never affected in any way by the kind of wife he had, whether she was a very good one or a very poor one in the professional sense. I did note that a man who was perhaps not especially gifted was greatly helped by a wife who was friendly and who was interested in what was going on, and who was helpful both in personal ways and in professional ways.

Q: You viewed this as a profession. You had a professional career.

BRIGGS: That was the part that was interesting to me, that it was a professional career. I remember thinking of my friends who were married to men who had businesses or who had professions that kept them very busy in the United States and how little they took part in their husbands' lives. They'd go to a big business dinner party or they would perhaps now and then meet the other people with whom their husbands worked, but they were not really involved in their husbands' lives, whereas the Foreign Service wives that I knew in most cases were actively involved in their husband's lives.

I think I learned something of this in my first post because we had a Naval mission there and I became good friends with the wives who were all older than I was. And I was very impressed with the courage and ability of the Naval wives in adapting themselves to living in foreign countries. They had, it seemed to me, a better approach to difficulties of that sort than some of the Army wives I met who had never lived anywhere but on American posts before.

Q: Side tracking a little, you mentioned the fact that Ambassador Briggs thought that there was an ability that foreign-born wives had.



BRIGGS: Yes. Later when the difficulty came up at the time when William Bullitt went to Russia and discovered that most of the wives of the senior officers there were foreign-born and got very much upset about the fact that they weren't American wives, Roosevelt introduced certain regulations which limited the entrance of foreign wives into the Service. That seemed absolutely ridiculous, both to my husband and me because the foreign wives I had met in various posts had almost always been much more sophisticated in a social and professional way than American-born wives. They had learned more languages. They had traveled to more countries, and they were more ready to conform to what was necessary to do. (Pause)

The woman who really helped me get started in the Service was a Frenchwoman, Jeanne Boal, Pierre Boal's wife. Pierre Boal had been a flyer in the first World War and he was in charge for while between ambassadors in Peru. I got acquainted with them there and Jeanne Boal gave me some awfully good advice.

Q: But you did not have any specific training like the young wives do today before you went in?

BRIGGS: No. Oh, I know what I want to tell you. How little my husband told me when we were first married. Because there had been a man in Africa who had written home about all the things that were going on. It was such a good letter that his wife shared it and it got into the local newspaper. (laughing) This was considered a shocking situation. So for a long time, Ellis wouldn't tell me anything. I was kept terribly ignorant and I was told by him not to write home about anything that was going on in the Embassy. I think I must have written very dull letters for the first few years!

Q: Now why don't we go back a little bit so that we bring this up to date. When did the Ambassador join the Foreign Service, how did he happen to go into the Foreign Service?

BRIGGS: Do you want me to go back to that long story about why he decided?

Q: Yes, well I think that's interesting. You can cut it if you like.



BRIGGS: I think my husband was always interested in travel and seeing strange countries. When he graduated from Dartmouth in 1921, he went out to Robert College. He was accompanied by Gordon Merriam who later entered the Service, too, and also became his brother-in-law some years later. They taught at Robert College for a little over a year. And then my husband resigned as did Gordon, came back to the United States, and decided he would try writing. He wrote fairly successfully. He sold a number of different stories to various magazines in New York. But at the same time, he was interested in the Foreign Service and he talked to a man who had lived in Hanover [New Hampshire] for a while who had been a minister in the Foreign Service before it became a professional service.

One day my husband was out skiing and fell and caught a dry branch which turned out to be poison ivy. This poisoned his hands so badly that he realized he couldn't go on typing and earning his living by writing stories. So he seriously considered going into the Foreign Service and went to Washington the winter of 1924-25 to talk the matter over. And in the winter of 1925-26, he entered a cram course taught by a very famous teacher called Angus Crawford. He took the examinations for the Service that spring and went abroad, as I remember it, the summer of 1925.

Q: Where did he go?

BRIGGS: He went to Lima, Peru. He had first thought he wanted to go out into China or Manchuria because the hunting was so good there. (laughs). But I'm happy to say he was given the job of vice consul in Callao. And that lasted for 2 years. In the spring of 1928, he was promoted to third secretary in Lima and he came home and we were married.

Q: How did you go back? How did you travel?

BRIGGS: We traveled back on the Grace Line, of course. A wonderful way to travel. It was filled with people who had business in countries all up and down the coast. Very few tourists. Only people who were seriously interested in what was going on in all that part of South America.

Q: So you learned as you were traveling?

BRIGGS: Yes, you met people who were vitally interested in what was going on.

Q: Now you told me that the Ambassador was in the second Foreign Service class. Tell me a little bit about the men who were Foreign Service officers previously, before him.



BRIGGS: The only one I remember...

Q: (interrupts) No, the type of men.

BRIGGS: Well I think they were all men who seriously wanted to have a profession in which they could work their way eventually to the top. I think they all went in for that reason.

Q: But they didn't take the exams and they had no specific training as they do today?

BRIGGS: Oh you mean before the...

Q: Before the Foreign Service.

BRIGGS: Oh, I'm not sure. I think they were people who went into it because they were interested in living abroad, they thought it was exciting to travel, and they may have had a sense of duty. I don't know about that or not. But in those days, as everybody knows, it was impossible to be at the top of the Service without a considerable private fortune. The salaries were extremely small and it was necessary, if you went to any big post, to pay a great deal out of your own pocket. My husband also said later on that it was quite interesting and remarkable how very many excellent ambassadors there were in the Service, even with that particular consideration. (Pause)

Q: I'm digressing a little bit, but there's a tremendous concern today amongst the tandem couples with separations. You people had separations, didn't you? Leave posts and be... Talk a little bit about that and evacuations and times...

BRIGGS: I think it was very good for me that at the very first post I knew those Navy wives because separation to them was just part of their profession. And I realized this could happen and it wasn't that important. That was your way of life and you managed. We had a lot of separations. Not when I was in Peru, the first post, but our second post was in Washington and my husband got a job going to Liberia with Judge Advocate General of the Army Winship. The League of Nations had accused Liberia of practices analogous to slavery. So the General was sent out to check on what was going on in Liberia and my husband went along with him. They took with them a third man who was their secretary. That was a very interesting adventure for them. They left the very day before the crash.

Q: In '29.



BRIGGS: In '29. And I found myself in Washington with no bank to go to. But happily an uncle was visiting me and gave me \$10.00.

Q: Which lasted longer.

BRIGGS: Which lasted a long time. (laughs)

Q: Were you ever evacuated from a post?

BRIGGS: No. We were fortunate in that way. We were in posts that went to pieces after we left and we were in posts that had gone to pieces before we got there. But nothing ever happened when we ourselves were there.

Q: Along this line a bit, will you talk a little bit about the period the Ambassador was out of the Service?

BRIGGS: Yes. His first post as ambassador was in the Dominican Republic in 1944. We were there and had been in Cuba. And we went down to the Dominican Republic that June, I think. The following Thanksgiving, Nelson Rockefeller, who had then acquired a certain status in dealing with things in South America, Latin affairs, although it was before he received the title which I think was Coordinator, wasn't it, of Latin American interests? Something of that sort. He and my husband disagreed on how the approach to the president of Santo Domingo, who was Trujillo, should be handled. My husband felt that his role was to have perfect respect between the two countries but no close friendship. Nelson Rockefeller did not agree with a lot of things my husband objected to. This was followed by the election year in which Roosevelt was re-elected for the third time.

My husband handed in his resignation as all ambassadors do when there is an election year, and his resignation was accepted. It happened that no one had ever considered a provision for keeping a professional officer in the Service if he lost his post as ambassador. This happened to someone else at the same time. I can't remember now who he was, but he was somewhere out, I think, in the Middle East.



So my husband went up to Washington immediately. And the children and I packed up. It was in the middle of winter, January, and there was no place for me to go at home. My family were living in one room to conserve heat and we had no winter clothes. We had gone to the Dominican Republic from Cuba. So I took the children back to Cuba and we got an apartment. And I put them back in the schools where they'd been and we stayed there until June when the schools closed. My husband went out to Chungking with General Hurley as his number two. And during the time he was there, or within the next year, a new regulation was put through in which a man - a professional Foreign Service officer - returned to the career as minister if he lost his job as ambassador.

Q: Your going to Cuba and staying was rather like the women during the Vietnam War who went off and stayed in Bangkok or Manila. But you did it on your own. How long was he in China?

BRIGGS: Well that was a long time later.

Q: Yes, oh I know. I'm jumping about. But do you want to tell us about that?

BRIGGS: Yes I'd be glad to. Yes of course. When we went out to Korea, I was the only diplomatic wife there for a while. We went out in '52 and all the diplomats had taken refuge in Pusan along with the Korean government, having been forced out of Seoul by the arrival of the Chinese Communists. I had of course to call upon Mrs. Rhee so when I went, I asked her what I could do to help. And she thought carefully of the situation and told me that the war widows of Korea were in great trouble. That before this had happened, a widow would be taken care of by her husband's family. But as all the families had been either destroyed or separated by the troubles of war, these women were in very hard straits.

So I got interested and I discovered that there were a number of religious groups who were looking after the widows of their own clergy. Also the Roman Catholic priests were looking after the widows of Catholics who had gone to their churches. There were the Seventh Day Adventists, the Roman Catholics, the Methodists, the Presbyterians. All had groups of war widows who were doing certain kinds of work and selling their work, handwork mostly.

There came a time when a young Korean woman with whom I got acquainted - a well-educated woman who had been a lawyer herself, had lost her husband during the war and was left with three little girls, was recommended to me as someone who might teach me Korean. I spoke to her about these groups of war widows working and she got very interested and excited. She herself started a group of women who were not connected with any religious organization.



Then later, this was sometime later, she came to me and asked if I thought her group could sell their things in the Army PX. I thought the matter over and I thought, since the other groups were all working so hard, they ought to be included. So I asked General Taylor if he thought this could be possible and he said, "I'll send my lawyers to talk to you." Some colonels came and seemed to think there would be a way of handling it if the money part could be solved because the PX script was not supposed to go into the Korean market.

I told all these groups of war widows including a Navy group and another group of young women who were orphan girls. They all sent representatives for the meeting and I was tremendously impressed with the speed and efficiency with which those women handled the situation. They chose a woman to run it, they worked out how they were going to divide the money, how the products for each group were to be labeled and it was done with remarkable efficiency, very, very quickly. Then it was arranged with the PX that an American would change the script into Korean money and that the Koreans would divide it up properly. So that was something that really fell into my lap in a way, but in which I was grateful for a chance to have a part.

Q: You explained that Mrs. Rhee was an Austrian and that they were anxious to have somebody, some American woman get to know her.

BRIGGS: That's what my husband was told later. The previous ambassador was not married and they thought it would be a good idea to have an American wife there who could get acquainted with Mrs. Rhee perhaps and possibly in some way reach Syngman Rhee through his wife.

Q: Well this shows where professionalism comes into it.

BRIGGS: Yes. (Pause) Shall I repeat what Dean Acheson said about my husband?

Q: Yes. How did the Ambassador, who was a so-called South American expert, happen to go to Prague? In 1949 did you go?

BRIGGS: In 1949. We'd been in Uruguay and my husband's service up to that point had been entirely in Washington and Latin America. Sometime after we left Prague I think, he had a chance to ask Dean Acheson how it was that we went to Prague. And Dean Acheson said, "Well, President Truman said he wanted a tough bastard there."



Q: When you first arrived in Prague, you had a big embassy. Do you want to talk a bit about those cuts?

BRIGGS: Yes of course. We drove into Prague from Germany and found ourselves living in an enormous, wonderful palace - the Petschek Palace, the biggest house we ever occupied. We also found we had a big staff, I think over 50 on the staff. And the Embassy life seemed to be not unlike what I had seen. But as the year passed, the pressures on the Czech people became stronger and stronger.

We were invited only once to any Czech home in all the time we were there. Czech people began to be afraid of inviting foreigners. The civilian Americans were all driven out. The civilian British all left. Civilians of all the non-Communist countries found themselves most unwelcome and departed. So those of us in the American Embassy found our entire social life was with our other diplomatic friends. The Czechs we would have gladly had in were afraid to even take a step into the Embassy. And with good reason too.

Well as time passed, pressures got stronger and stronger, worse and worse on the Czech people and stronger and stronger on the Americans, and one day most of the Embassy officers were ordered out of the country. They were ordered out so quickly, so fast, that a lot of the wives had to be left behind to pack up, get themselves and the children out. People may remember that there was retaliation in this country, too. That a great many Czech diplomats were forced to leave. Our Embassy was reduced to essentially seven people.

Q: Excuse me, but I think we were twelve plus the ambassador.

BRIGGS: Twelve people, but seven officers.

Q: Officers, yes.

BRIGGS: I think it was seven officers. A few were married, so there were other people. There was one representative for both the Army and the Navy attachés and there were a few secretaries allowed to stay. And it was quite remarkable what extra work those secretaries who were all girls were able to do. The theory that the way to protect the code room was to have somebody sleeping in it was followed. And the girls, various young people, took turns sleeping in the code room.

Q: We had no guards.



BRIGGS: Some of the wives who had had experience in coding also gave time and did some work for the code people. Lynn did that, didn't she?

Q: Yes. You told me a lovely story. I think the whole church experience was terribly important - the fact that you had church at the residence. And your Christmas Eve service.

BRIGGS: When we came, the British were anxious to bring in the Anglican priest from Vienna for services. And the first time that they wanted to come, they hoped to use one of the Czech Protestant churches. But the Czech government said it could be used for any of the diplomats who wanted to go to service there, provided they would make sure that no Czech came to the service. And of course that angered everybody among the non-Communist diplomats.

And we offered our big central hall for the first of the services. I remember with great interest that some of the people who came to that service were not members of the Anglican church. In fact I think some of them were Roman Catholics. I remember the wife of the Minister of Iran was there. I think she was a Swiss. And I remember there were friends from South America who I know were Roman Catholics who came to that service.

After that - we had had a small drawing room in our enormous house with an outside entrance and that used to be used on Sundays for church services for those who wanted to come when the Anglican priest was there, and also on Sundays with a lay service. The Episcopal Church may have a lay service without a priest in all respects except for communion. So we had regular church services there while we were there.

Q: Tell me about going to a Czech mass one night.

BRIGGS: Yes, and of course the most extraordinary memory I have of Czechoslovakia was on a New Year's Day when we went down to the famous church in the center of the city to the New Year's Day service. It was very full of Czech people. I went with the wife of the Chargé, Ruth Thompson. I think my daughter was there, and there may have been one or two others. We looked like the Czechs. We all had cloth coats and scarves tied over our heads.

We went down in our private car which was driven by the butler because my husband and his counselor were using the official car to make official calls on the Foreign Minister and the President. They were not received at any of those places. They were given a book to sign. In the church, we stayed through the service, and after the service was over, we walked around to look at the beautiful statues. And as we started to leave the church, we found the people going out very slowly. It was almost like a jam. We followed them slowly.



I remember Ruth Thompson saying to me, "Do you suppose it's our car that's doing this?" Our car, of course, had an American flag on it. We never went anywhere without the American flag on the car. And we got to the doorway and looked down the long flight of stairs to the street, and there was our car at the bottom of the steps. The square in front of the church was absolutely full of people. All over, on the sidewalks, in the street, all around the car. This was somewhat alarming, because what were they going to do? So all of us quickly got down to the car. But people around us began to wave to us. And men took their hats off and I saw people crying. It was terribly moving, especially because nobody made a single sound. And we rode absolutely silently back to the house. It was an extraordinary experience.

Q: You had the flag flying also on top of the Chancery?

BRIGGS: Yes, we always did. Flying high up above everything.

Q: And they looked down from the castle on it.

BRIGGS: Which reminds me that the American flag probably means a great deal more to Foreign Service people than civilians can ever imagine.

Q: At times like that. On the Fourth of July.

BRIGGS: On the Fourth of July. Or just to see it there in the midst of everything.

Q: Connected with the church in a way were the Christmas carols that we sang. Those stories of coming to ...

BRIGGS: When we got there, when there were so many people at all the embassies, there was a large group of people who sang Christmas carols going around from one embassy to another. And when they came to the American Embassy residence, they went up on the roof. We had a great big open flat roof in the front of the house, and they sang Christmas carols there. That was followed by the tightening of restrictions and the large number of Americans forced out. And the following Christmas, there were very few people who were willing to stand up on that roof and sing Christmas carols. But I think there were a group of about six or eight of us who did it.



But the next year, there was a great deal more resistance. And a great many more diplomats came and some of them from countries that you wouldn't expect to come sing Christmas carols. And we sat out on the roof and sang Christmas carols again. And we ended up by singing a famous Czech Christmas carol which I was told used to be sung always at the end of the midnight service at Christmas and was considered a resistance hymn. And we learned it and sang it. And then down the street, there was a group of men who sang it back to us.

Q: And the lights went out.

BRIGGS: And the lights went out. And the lights went out across the street so people could come and not be seen looking at us.

Q: Very exciting.

BRIGGS: What is it, something, something Christmas pan. What are the first words of it? St. Christopan. Narodil Se Kristus Pan.

Q: I think I have it somewhere. ? (Briggs hums)

BRIGGS: Years later, after Prague, we were in Brazil and a lady sent word that she would like to call on me. She came, she had a Scottish name. But then it turned out that she had been connected with the Petschek family. She had been a Czech and wanted to talk to me because I had lived in the Petschek Palace. While she was there I said to her, "Did Solomon Petschek ever get his Certificate of Bar Mitzvah?" The bottom of that great big house had quantities of storerooms and a great many things in them had belonged to the Petschek family. I went through all of them once, and while I was going through, I found a paper which was the Certificate of Bar Mitzvah of Solomon Petschek. It seemed a shame not to send it back to him. It had no value to the American government, why shouldn't it go back to him?

Well, Anne Penfield had a sister who was visiting her, and the sister knew some of the Petscheks in New York City. So I said, "Take this back and mail it, don't put your name on it, just mail it to Solomon Petschek." That was the last I ever heard of it. But when this relative came calling - I don't think I knew who she was, as I say she was Mrs. with a Scottish name - I said, "Did Solomon Petschek ever get his Certificate of Bar Mitzvah back?" And she said, "Is that where it came from? it was my father. And he always wondered where it had come from."

Q: Isn't that something.



BRIGGS: It was such fun. (laughs)

Q: Well you must have had experiences like this in other posts.

BRIGGS: Well not so many, but a few.

Q: I think I should have you comment a bit on Cuba, you know how you...

BRIGGS: Well the first time was the end of 1933 right after the Machado Revolution and my daughter was two years old, about to be three, I guess. And my husband was assigned to Cuba under Jefferson Caffery along with Doc Matthews. Jefferson Caffery had picked Doc Matthews, and Doc Matthews picked the rest of the staff, he picked Ellis. And things were very disturbed. We were not really comfortable. So it was decided that I would stay home with the baby.

Q: In Washington?

BRIGGS: No, with my parents. I was living with my mother in New Rochelle, New York. And before Thanksgiving, or shortly after Thanksgiving, Ellis wrote up and urged me to come. I remember with pride and great love my mother's face when she said, "Oh, not for Christmas? Then she said, "Well of course you should be there!"

Q: So many separations.

BRIGGS: Oh dear. So we went down by ship and we went out to live in the house that belonged to someone else. We rented a house on the outskirts of Havana. At first, life seemed a little bit scary because you'd hear guns being fired off in the night. And there would be a crowd of people rushing around and you'd step into a shop and get out of the crowds. Or later on, there were bombs left in the stores and one woman was killed picking up a piece of material in a shop when a bomb went off. So you would have to stop before you'd go into the Five and Ten and show that you had no bomb in your pocketbook.

Q: Shades of today.



BRIGGS: But things straightened out after a while. Certainly service under Jefferson Caffery was very valuable for my husband. He always felt that was the best experience he ever had in the Foreign Service as far as learning how to be a Foreign Service officer was concerned. We made very good friends with the people we served with. It was strenuous, but it was worthwhile. My son was born there, so that made it pleasant too. He was born on a day when there was a complete strike and there was no telephone service. But as my mother said later on, "Well, there was no telephone in my childhood either." (laughs)

Q: Then you went back to Cuba.

BRIGGS: Then in 1940 we went back to Cuba from Chile and had three more years. Altogether about seven years in Cuba.

Q: That was the last post before he became ambassador?

BRIGGS: Before he became ambassador, yes. He went from Cuba to the Dominican Republic.

Q: Which was his first post as an ambassador. How do you feel about Cuba now?

BRIGGS: Well I can't see how they could ever get anywhere while Castro is alive.

Q: Do you feel that anything may happen in Cuba because of the events that are happening in Eastern Europe?

BRIGGS: I wonder, I wonder.

Q: Did you ever have language training - I know you studied - but did you have language training as such in the State Department?

BRIGGS: Not in Washington until we were about to go to Brazil. Then I went down and stayed for two weeks, I think it was, and took the State Department Portuguese course. I had already, finally, had that in Spanish in Uruguay. I had spent almost twenty years trying to learn Spanish in the ordinary way and really not achieved any control over it until I took that course. (End of Tape I, Side A)



Q: And you were talking about finally taking the State Department course in Spanish. And then you went to Czechoslovakia and ...

BRIGGS: By that time I could speak Spanish.

Q: But that you never used it again.

BRIGGS: Well, never in a post. I had a chance to speak Spanish to people from time to time, and I find I still can speak Spanish. I lack practice. I suppose my vocabulary needs to be refurbished.

Q: But you said that you went from there to Korea and to ...

BRIGGS: I never lived in another Spanish-speaking country except for that one year in Peru. And part of that time I spent home anyway, because my father was very ill. But taking that course in Portuguese, I did learn enough Brazilian Portuguese to be able to carry on a conversation and not mix it up with Spanish. I remember once quite proudly being able to speak Spanish to somebody who sat on my right, and then speak Portuguese to somebody who sat on my left.

Q: So that if you had had the opportunity to take the language that we are giving to young people today, it would have been a great advantage.

BRIGGS: It would have been a great advantage. At least for me, that kind of training was right. Because I am eye-minded. I remember things by seeing them. I never learned to remember them by hearing them, and this taught me to hear.

Q: Yes, the language.

BRIGGS: Of course the theory is that if you can say it, you can hear it, and that may be true, but you have to know that you're saying it, have to hear yourself saying it.

Q: Yes, yes, to remember it. (Pause) Could we talk a bit about young women working today in the Foreign Service?

BRIGGS: The second salary... it's awful nowadays for some people. Is that true with the Foreign



BRIGGS: Well you might be interrupted, but you can keep on doing things. The volunteer work which is possible to do is always there. Look what my daughter-in-law has done with the music in Honduras. And this is a very satisfying way to spend your time. You're not only helping other people, but you're doing the right thing by your husband, you know. You're making the Americans welcome.

Q: And your country.

BRIGGS: And the country, yes. And it seems to me that that, if it isn't a question of money, it's a pity to forget that you can make yourself a career in volunteer work.

Q: Well you also were saying yesterday that there was a professionalism to being a good Foreign Service wife.

BRIGGS: Yes, yes. Why of course there is, yes.

Q: You taught us. You had meetings. And I can remember several of us being handed eighty-three names who you were going to seat at one large horse-shoe table and we were to seat them, which was a marvelous experience. (Briggs laughs)

BRIGGS: Well, what was it? Oh, in Uruguay there was a brand-new wife, young bride who came in. And she was very baffled about what she should do because in Washington they had handed her a paper on protocol. Oh I know what it was. She wrote me a letter and wrote it "Dear Madam" and signed it "Very truly yours" or something like that. So I asked her into lunch and I said, "I don't mean to criticize you, but how did you happen to write me that way? "Well," she said, "I thought it was funny, but that's how they told me to address an ambassador's wife in Washington." So I got hold of a dear friend, Caroline Brown, her husband was Wim Brown. She thought this paper was as funny as I did. I said, "Let's get together and re-write it, because this is absolutely idiotic." So we re-wrote the protocol notes.

Q: And sent it back to Washington.

BRIGGS: I hope we did. I don't remember whether we did or not. (laughs) I think we did. I still have the protocol notes we re-wrote.



Q: But "Dear Madam."

BRIGGS: "Very truly yours." And she was so nice about it. She said, "I did think it was awfully funny."

Q: I can also remember the ambassador being upset because he'd been aboard the SS United States and there were several young Foreign Service officers and nobody introduced themselves and he said, "I wouldn't have asked anything from them. But they would have been there if I had needed them, and I might have been able to do something that would have been fun for them." And we never forgot that.

BRIGGS: I remember in Greece there was a woman who refused to call on me when the others did. Didn't call on me when the others did. So I went around to call on her to see how she was.

But there was something else. There's another thing that occurs to me that young wives need help with. When I was growing up, we had a cook and a waitress in the house. And my mother was very good at handling them. They were usually Irish girls. And I remember I made a horrible mistake. I was about eleven or twelve and I was riding in a car with my uncle's chauffeur. And I licked a stamp and put it on his cheek. And he was absolutely outraged. He bristled. He never said anything to me, but later he complained bitterly to the others. And I remember hearing my mother's voice in my head saying, "We must always be very careful how we treat the servants." Well, later on, toward the end of my mother's life, she was living without anybody for a while.

So I remember going to Peru, and here I was not speaking Spanish. I learned to say "tiene que", you must. And here I was acquiring a butler and a cook. And a laundress. And although I'd grown up with servants, I'd never handled servants myself. I remember Jeanne Boal giving me wonderful advice I've never forgotten. She said, "You must be very firm and very just. To be very just is important, but be firm, too." And that to me was a very important piece of information.

Q: And it would be even more important today when, as you say, people have not...

BRIGGS: Well they all have servants. It depends on where you are. They can become friends so they attach themselves to you, but you must always maintain this balance, this difference, this justice and firmness. And I should think that would be a great difficulty for the young wives nowadays.

Q: Who have never grown up with any help.



BRIGGS: I think the World War destroyed the Service as an entity which had great pride in itself as a professional service. There had not been any until 1924. And a need for a professional service had become very evident to anybody that wanted to have the American Foreign Service a distinctive, excellent one. As a matter of fact, it seems to me the Brazilian Service was as fine a service as there has ever been, in this part of the world anyway. And they had the same feeling of distinction, of the fact that it mattered to have a special service.

Q: And that the people in it were proud.

BRIGGS: And the people were proud of it and that they were able people.

Q: And you knew each other.

BRIGGS: And you knew each other. And there was a gossip about people so you knew what was going to happen when you met a certain group or when you didn't meet a certain group. It was not unlike a fraternity I suppose, although perhaps not quite so close as a fraternity, and you trusted other people because you knew they had the same training you had and had more or less accepted the same inevitabilities that you had accepted. (Pause) We twice served with Canadians who became warm, close friends. It was lovely when you found the same people at another post.

Q: In this fraternity?

BRIGGS: Fraternity. (laughs) Sorority and fraternity all mixed together.

Q: Did we mention that Ambassador Briggs was in the second professional Foreign Service class.

BRIGGS: I think we did. He got in in '25 and he went out in the field in '26.

Q: They took several days of exams then, didn't they?

BRIGGS: They took a lot of exams. They took written exams and they took oral exams.



Q: Yes. I was trying to think. I think they had something like three days and then it was cut to one. (Pause) Where was the Ambassador when Roosevelt died?

BRIGGS: He was in Chungking where he was charge. There was a tremendous rush of suggestions of who should give the memorial service. Missionaries wanted to do it, of course. And the Army, everybody. My husband went to LK Little who had been there a great many years who said, "Get the General to do it. Chiang Kai-shek. Let the Chinese do it." And that was the absolutely right thing to do. They had the right kind of service, they had a great deal of respect.

Q: And General Hurley was our Ambassador?.

BRIGGS: Yes, but he was home. (Pause)

Q: You had a wonderful doctor experience in Prague.

BRIGGS: Yes. The Penfields had a dog and the dog was bothering my dog. So I took a stick and ordered him away. He did, he went back to the Penfield's house. I went over to speak to the Penfields to tell them that our dogs were in trouble together. The dog came to the door as I went in and bit my hand.

I was taken to the hospital by one of the housemen who didn't speak much English, but could explain to them what had happened. A very nice doctor and nurse treated my hand, and I had to go back a second day to have it treated again. The second time I went back - the doctor spoke some English - I said to him, "You've been very kind to me here and I'd like to do something. I know you won't let me pay for it. But I would like to do something, I'd like to bring something. Could I bring some chocolate for the children in the hospital?" He said, "You think they don't have it?" I said, "No, no, I don't mean it that way. It's because I'd like to do something." He said, "It is better to give nothing. I can say no more. I might be understood. It is better to give nothing."

Later I gave some money to the houseman who passed it to one of the nurses in the hall. A nurse came to change the bandage on my hand. I pulled money out of my pocket and raised my eyebrows in question like this and she took it and quickly put it away.

Q: I also remember the Ambassador walking. Czechs drove around in bullet-proof cars and the Ambassador would walk from the Residence to the Chancery and back.



BRIGGS: I walked constantly with the dog. I walked in that big park all the time. I walked down to the Chancery several times. Then they began putting a police guard on the Chancery. One day the man tried to stop me. I said to the Embassy police, "I belong here. I'm not going to show you my card." When I came out, he had disappeared. I guess he found out who I was. He wasn't going to bother me anymore. I'm afraid I took a rather great pleasure in defying him.

I said once in Rio that Prague was the most beautiful city I've ever seen. And the Brazilians said, "We think Rio is very beautiful." I said, "Well Rio has some beautiful scenery, but it's not the city that's so beautiful, it's the natural surroundings that are so beautiful. Prague is a truly beautiful city." (End of Tape 1)

Q: This is October 7, 1990, and I am again at the home of Mrs. Ellis Briggs continuing our interview from a year ago.

BRIGGS: I thought I might talk about ambassadors under whom my husband served who meant a great deal in his and my life. Of course the first one would be important in any case, at least the first for me was, Alexander P. Moore. He had not started in as a professional Foreign Service officer. That would have been impossible at his age. But he had served as ambassador in Spain and there were a lot of wonderful stories about him. He became very, very friendly with the King of Spain to the point that was horrifying to those who had been familiar with the protocol of the Spanish Court. There was one story that he had bought something special as a present for the Queen from the United States that he knew she wanted. And as he went into the palace, he was met by one of the princesses and handed the package to her saying, "Please give this to your mother."

He was the widower of Lillian Russell which made him particularly glamorous to me. In 1928, when I went back with my husband to Peru - he went back, I went for the first time - Alexander P. Moore had become the ambassador shortly before our return. He was at the time a rather impressive character being so entirely sure of himself and sure of what he wanted. It became evident that what he really wanted to do was to solve the Tacna Arica problem which had been troubling both countries for some time - Chile and Peru. And of course during his assignment there, Tacna Arica's problem was settled. He became very friendly with President Leguía and that made the solution more possible.

Q: Didn't you say that President Leguía had been a life insurance salesman?



BRIGGS: I believe so. I'd rather not state that as a fact, but I believe that was true. (pause) My husband had been vice consul in Callao for two years - his first post. About the time that he came up to be married, he had been assigned as third secretary to the embassy in Lima - not much of a journey. Incidentally he was the only third secretary in the entire Lima Diplomatic Corps. He had two friends who entered the Service as vice consuls - John Cabot and Samuel Reber, Jr., and they became very good friends and the friendship lasted for many years. (phone rings - pause)

Q: So they were together in Lima - Cabot and Reber.

BRIGGS: A wonderful trio. Alexander P. Moore always enjoyed company and having people come in to parties, but never touched a drop of liquor himself. I found him a little overwhelming at first, but I soon recognized that he was really a friendly person, but was not quite sure how to approach the wives of his vice consul and third secretary. However, the fact that he was successful with the Tacna Arica settlement was impressive. I remember when the final word came through that it was settled, my husband, who had been working very late - actually he did all the coding, there was no code clerk in those days - brought the message to Ambassador Moore who was playing bridge at some big bridge party. And Ambassador Moore seized the message, was perfectly delighted, and said, "This is wonderful, this is wonderful. Tell Lucy to go out and buy herself something nice."

Q: How nice. (laughter) So he did care about wives.

BRIGGS: Yes, he did care. Actually there was one other wife, the wife of the chargé. But that was a sad story and I'd rather not go into it now. I never was willing to accept a present from Ambassador Moore for some odd reason. But later on, when my poor little cook who came from the mountains - the altitude, what we called the "altiplano" - turned out to have serious tuberculosis, I asked him for a check in the amount of \$50 to give her to help her go back to her village. And he gave it to me. He was home on leave when my husband took a vacation trip with me to Ecuador, and as we were returning to Lima, we got word that he had died in the United States. It was really a shock to us. We had not realized he was that ill.

Q: He was still ambassador at that time?



BRIGGS: He was still ambassador. The next ambassador that I remember with great affection and admiration - in fact, the one I remember with the most affection and admiration - was Jefferson Caffery. My husband had been assigned to Washington after his tour in Peru. We were there two years. And then he was recruited for Havana, Cuba by Doc Matthews who himself was chosen by Jefferson Caffery. That was an interesting and memorable tour of duty. The Machado Revolution had happened in the summer of 1933 if I remember correctly.

I had a daughter who was not quite three years old and it was decided because the situation was so uncertain it would be better for us not to go down to Havana immediately. So Ellis went off by himself. But within a short time - just before Thanksgiving or so - Ellis decided it would be all right for us to come down, so off we went. I think I talked about Havana the last time we talked.

Q: A little, but, you know this is all interesting. And only a very little about Jefferson Caffery. This is very good to have.

BRIGGS: I think that Ellis felt that Jefferson Caffery was the ambassador from whom he learned the most about what the Service was and how an officer in the Service should act. Jefferson Caffery believed that an ambassador should be respected, not necessarily liked. He never sought to be popular, but he certainly sought to be respected.

Q: Now he was an example of someone who was a diplomat before the Foreign Service Act.

BRIGGS: That's right. He had been in the Service for a long time. He had been ambassador to Colombia before Havana and it was there that he'd known Doc Matthews. When he was assigned to Havana after all this trouble started, he chose Doc Matthews and asked Doc to think up the rest of the office. And the situation being so severe and troublesome, I think the State Department was quite willing to go along with that. Doc Matthews of course had been in the first professional class, Ellis having been in the second. So Jefferson Caffery was a very strong and quiet influence all that period in Havana that was so difficult.

And then another ambassador with whom my husband had close ties - closer personal ties than with Jefferson Caffery - was Spruille Braden. The reason for that was that Spruille Braden had lived in Riverdale-on-Hudson where my husband grew up. Their families had been acquainted. Spruille Braden was not a career man but had the approach of a man who cared about the Service and cared about what he accomplished as an American.

Q: What post was that?



BRIGGS: It was in Cuba. Of course he spoke perfect Spanish and he had an understanding of the minds of people who spoke Spanish, although I must say they differ in all countries. (laughs) (pause) Spruille Braden, having been brought up in Chile where his father was involved in the copper mines of Chile, spoke perfect Spanish and married a Chilean, Maria. He understood the Latin minds of his people and was a powerful ambassador in the countries where he served. At the time of the struggle in Paraguay between Paraguay, Argentina, and Chile, he sat on the board which was to mediate the problem and took six months to do it. But it was accomplished, and successfully. He understood the Latin mind. He realized that a quick bargain will not work and had the patience to follow a long procedure. I've often thought that that is the great problem of Americans. We think the quick solution is the right solution, and we come across many peoples who believe the only right solution is the long, drawn-out solution.

Q: Deliberation.

BRIGGS: Deliberation. To take up both, all, sides of the question. This is something that we have too little experience in, and we are not supported by our media which demands a quick answer. End of deliberation on my part.

It happened that when my husband was an officer in the Service before he himself became ambassador, we served under several ambassadors who were not married. Under Mr. Caffery in Havana the ranking wife was Frisk Matthews, wife of Doc Matthews.

Q: Doc Matthews. What was his position in Cuba?

BRIGGS: He was chargé d'affaires. Frisk became a very dear friend. Chris I remember with great affection. Jefferson Caffery was married later in life, but I never had a chance to serve under his wife whom I would gladly have known better. Spruille Braden was married to a Chilean, Maria, whom I grew very fond of. But in no sense was she the kind of dominating wife that one heard about in other circumstances. She was a friend and I was happy to know her and do what I could for her.



Later in Cuba, we served for a short while with George Messersmith. Actually this was before we served with the Bradens. We had served twice in Cuba - or was it three times? (laughs) Let me see. We served in Cuba under Jefferson Caffery and we served in Cuba under George Messersmith and then Spruille Braden followed George Messersmith, that's right. Mrs. Messersmith was a Foreign Service wife and I remember her with admiration and affection. I always thought I was lucky to have a professional wife, so to speak, who was so understanding. My husband's comments on George Messersmith are not as enthusiastic, but I do want to put in this one word for Mrs. Messersmith. I never went through the experience I heard other people had of being told what to do, told how to behave at a party, told what parties to go to. I'm happy to say I escaped all that.

Q: Maybe that's why you became such a marvelous ambassador's wife yourself. I mean in many ways, but certainly as far as teaching the rest of us, showing us the way.

BRIGGS: Well I know it wasn't until I had my last post that I really knew how to be in the Foreign Service. (laughs) I know that. Well now, what more?

Q: Well you mentioned yesterday how you had enjoyed it in Uruguay and how you wished you had been there longer because of the horseback riding.

BRIGGS: Well of course Uruguay followed that disturbing experience in Santo Domingo, my husband's first job as ambassador, which lasted only eight months because his resignation was accepted when Roosevelt became President again. He was sent to Chungking and, after the war was over, to Washington. Toward the end of our stay in Washington in '47, he heard that the American ambassador to Uruguay had suddenly died. So he made inquiries as to whether or not he would be eligible for the assignment and was given it.

Uruguay was very different from any other post I had. It was much easier and very pleasant. The climate was lovely. There was no particular political problem in Uruguay at that time, although we did use to refer to it, even in that time, as "the good old days." We could see that the Socialist inclination in Uruguay was probably going to produce problems, as it did. But life was very pleasant and very easy in Uruguay in those days. Our children were able to come down every summer. By this time they were in school at home which meant that they had winter all year round. But it wasn't a very severe winter and it was a very open winter. Also I had a chance to ride horseback which is something I had not been able to do since I had been a child, and which I'd always wanted to do. So the whole memory of Uruguay is a pleasant one. I think I told you about leaving my mark on Montevideo.

Q: Oh yes, please, but it's not recorded. Do tell me. That's marvelous.



BRIGGS: In front of the embassy residence in Montevideo was a big circular road and the traffic went in all directions, not completely around one way. So there were very frequent clashes. In those days it seemed to me that the Uruguayans were driving their cars as if they were riding horses, very much the same spirit. One doesn't expect horses to clash, but cars do clash when they go opposite ways toward each other. One day I happened to meet a young man who had something to do with the city government of Montevideo - I can't remember now what it was. And I said, "You know there are a lot of automobiles hitting each other in that circle in front of the American Embassy residence. Why don't they arrange to have the traffic go around in one way the way they do in Washington?" He said, "That's a fine idea." And the next thing I knew, they had sent policemen out who stayed there about a week or two teaching the people to drive only around the circle in one way.

Q: That's wonderful.

BRIGGS: Our second stay in Peru after thirty years away ended after one year - it seemed much too short - because my husband was offered the post in Brazil. In those days the capital was Rio. And that was a very interesting and memorable assignment. I learned enough Portuguese to manage, taking a short course but what was the Army course in language, which, incidentally, I recommend highly. I think that is the way to learn to speak a language, especially for people like me who, up to then, had learned only by looking at words, memorizing words by sight. But to hear them and memorize them by hearing is the way to learn to speak a language.

I enjoyed our years in Rio. We did a great deal of traveling. My husband managed to go to every one of the Brazilian states. I went to almost all of them with him. It was interesting to see the different kinds of people in different parts of Brazil, to see the richness of Brazil. It still makes me wonder why Brazil cannot achieve its ends without cutting down its rainforests. And getting to know the Brazilian people who are very friendly, pleasant people.

Q: What was the situation in Brasilia? Were they building it when you were there?

BRIGGS: Yes. It was decided that Rio was too far from the rest of the states. The then president was determined to set up a capitol which would be physically more available to the other states. And he managed to get the thing started. And it really started from very little. It's a beautiful state where Brasilia is, and was a place where they formed a lake. The lake is essentially artificial, but very large and beautiful. And the climate is pleasant. And I think as a capital it has been successful. It was extremely well planned so there were no streets which held up traffic - traffic flows like water through a series of pipes. And everything was kept on a very comfortable and attractive level with no provisions for poor sections or less attractive sections.



Unfortunately, of course, human beings can easily attack that kind of thoughtful organization and large settlements of poor people spontaneously grew up outside of Brasilia. I don't know whether they still exist, but I do know they were there when we were there. We did have a chance to explore Brasilia - we visited there one time. That was great fun to see how the city was growing and what was going to happen. And we did get back once years later to see it a very flourishing, thriving, beautiful city.

Q: As the capital by then.

BRIGGS: The capital of Brazil. But to the Brazilians, nothing is compared to Rio. Rio has a most beautiful location with tremendous mountains right behind it and a beautiful sea right in front of it. Wonderful beaches, where people spend a great deal of their time. I remember the Carnival in Rio was something wonderful. A great many people would escape from Carnival and get up into the hills, but of course we wanted to see it at least once and did. And the people spent their time in music and dancing. In the middle of the day, I remember seeing little boys walking down the street dancing as they walked. The effect of this was controlled by shutting up the liquor stores but what the people really were excited by was the music and the formal dancing of the parades.

Q: Costumes?

BRIGGS: Wonderful costumes. The working people would form into groups often under the names of the company they were working for and spend the entire year preparing for that Carnival dance and the parade down the street. And you'd see them coming down. Each group would have a different costume, different music, a different way of dancing. It was quite extraordinary.

Q: Very healthy.

BRIGGS: Yes.

Q: Too bad more people can't focus on something like that other places. (pause) A little bit about Korea?



BRIGGS: Of all the posts we had, I think for me personally Korea was the most important. It was really the first time I'd had a chance to take part in what my husband was doing. As I mentioned I think before, at first I was the only ambassadorial wife there in Pusan where everybody had taken refuge. After I was there, several others came. I had talked about the work with the war widows hadn't I?

Q: Yes, yes. But it was such a serious time, too.

BRIGGS: A very serious time indeed. But then President Rhee insisted on going back to Seoul which was the capital. So we moved back, too, and lived in a rather sparse fashion for a short while, but enjoyed it. It was interesting to see how strong and determined the Koreans were to have life on the free and democratic level.

Q: Did you have other wives? I don't think today the wives would be really in a war zone.

BRIGGS: Well after we moved, a few other wives were allowed to come. Some of them had to stay in Japan, but little by little others were allowed to come.

Q: And children?

BRIGGS: I don't think we had any young children at all. I'm sure we didn't. Most of the young officers were not married. That was just at the time of that dreadful attack on the State Department by ...

Q: Oh yes. Senator McCarthy.

BRIGGS: Senator McCarthy. And my husband thought at one point that he'd be fired because he wrote a letter denouncing the burning of books.

Q: The ambassador was always very outspoken and I can imagine his rage during this period.

BRIGGS: Oh very, very. He wrote a letter and was encouraged by his chief officer...

Q: Who was his counselor?



BRIGGS: Who was his counselor, Niles Bond. But of course it's a good thing he did, I mean, that was the right thing to do.

Q: So many people were hurt.

BRIGGS: All these young unmarried officers were scared out of their wits. (laughs) At least I think they were. A lot of them married as soon as they left Korea. But there was good spirit in the embassy, and people were interested in accomplishing things. And finally some of the other wives were allowed to come. There had been some of the girl secretaries there, even when the wives weren't there. They did good jobs. I think on the whole the state of mind was normal and healthy.

The war was not too awfully far away. I remember one day a little airplane came from the north flying so low that it apparently was under the radar sign and dropped bombs on some installation of oil something of that sort. It went right over the embassy residence and we all sat outside and watched it. We supposedly had a bomb shelter, but nobody wanted to go into it - it looked too dangerous. (laughs) But that was the only time I remember an actual attack of that sort. But we could sometimes hear guns in the north.

Q: Well you were close.

BRIGGS: We were close. I have many memories of the Army there. Very helpful to us, very friendly. General Taylor was very helpful in anything we tried to do. He became a good friend. I remember General Mark Wayne Clark telling a very funny story on himself which was surprising. I think he repeated the story in his books, so I'm not telling something nobody else knows. We had good relations with the Army. I think for the first time my husband made good friends with Army people. Over the years in the Service, there had been pleasant Army attaché<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>s and Navy attaché<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>s, but in many cases in South America, it seemed as if the appointments of those attaché<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>s was made just to find them something to do. That may be an unfortunate comment to make. My husband developed a great deal of respect for his Army friends in Korea. (pause)

The relationship of the chief of mission and his wife to the officers and their wives has always been of interest to me. When we were sent to Uruguay, it was my husband who had the idea that it would be a good thing to invite the officers coming new to the post with their wives and children, if they had them, to stay with us a night or two until they got adjusted to their situation, or found a place to live or any of those necessary activities. I soon began to realize that this was really a good idea and so of course we kept it up.

Q: Well you had us living with you in the beautiful residence in Prague, an amazing place.



BRIGGS: There was always plenty of room and plenty of chance to do this.

Q: Well it goes back to the calling also.

BRIGGS: And it makes me wonder now what happens when young couples not experienced in the Service manage when they get to a post, if the relationship between the wife of the ambassador and the wife of the officer is supposed to be so separate. Or at least that's the impression I get from the situation. I remember in Brazil, because that was a big office, asking the senior wives to come in and talk about any problems that they knew of, any difficulties with the younger wives. And they were all very helpful and they were all very eager to help if they could.

Q: I think that's the only way it can be handled.

BRIGGS: I think that should be. I hope it's done. I know that my daughter-in-law would like very much to be involved with the wives of the other officers. But there seems to be an order going out from headquarters that the younger wives are to be completely disassociated, totally private.

Q: They lose so much.

BRIGGS: Now maybe I misunderstand that, but that's the impression I get.

Q: You were talking about Monica Wallner. Where was that?

BRIGGS: They served with us in Brazil. He was counselor, you know, chargé d'affaires.

Q: Will you relate why she didn't become part of the group?



BRIGGS: Oh yes. Of course times were different then. The approach seems to be very different to me now. But I did try to have a personal relationship with the wives of the officers, and I was always hopeful that I could get them interested in doing things for the people of the country because I knew that was the best way to have good relations with the country. When we were in Brazil, Woody Wallner, that was my husband's chargĳ½... I found that Monica Wallner was not particularly interested in joining the other wives in any activity to benefit the people of Rio. But she was very interested in animal protection and the Humane Society for dogs and other animals there. And I thought, "Why should I urge her to do something that doesn't interest her when this does interest her and will affect a lot of other people?"

Q: I'm not saying this just to praise you, but I think I've got to get it down somewhere, either in your history or in mine. People have criticized ambassadors' wives who have ordered them to do this and that. And there's always the talk about when your children were sick, you had to leave them at home and go off to meetings and so forth. I never had the feeling that you ever did that. We would go and arrange flowers - not that we really had to - but you felt it was important for us to learn how to conduct ourselves in the Foreign Service. I never looked back on those things that you taught us in so many different areas that obviously we participated in when we could, ever with the feeling of, "Oh my land, why do I have to do this today?"

BRIGGS: (laughs) Well that certainly is very nice to hear. I always felt the need for independence myself and of course I was lucky in that I never had to serve under a very dominating or domineering wife of an ambassador or chargĳ½. So I was spared any struggle of that sort.

Q: You were very strong and we were such a small community, but we were given our own freedom, we really were, in the midst of all this.

BRIGGS: (laughs) I remember reading many years ago, long before I was married, a wonderful book about life in medieval Scandinavia in which the young wife of an officer in the army, I think it was, entered the house where there had been another mistress, but everything had gone completely kaput. And she handled her medieval servants not by punishing them or scolding them if they didn't do what she wanted to do, but by acting as if she thought they hadn't understood or were a little stupid, and then tried to show them again how to do things. (laughs)

Q: And you remembered that.

BRIGGS: (laughs) I remembered that all those years. I thought it probably is the way one ought to work. You could get people to do things if you could show them that they could understand if they tried.



Q: And praise them when they did it right instead of punishing them when they did it incorrectly or by ignoring something. (pause) (End of Tape II, Side A)

BRIGGS: You asked me if I still had my diplomatic passport. Yes I do, but I had to turn in the one that I kept for so many years, to my great regret. The one I have now was issued June 30, 1983 and I note that it expires on June 29, 1993. So I'll have to keep my eye on it, whether or not I'll have to renew it.

Q: Then we were going to make some comments on the Polish ambassador.

BRIGGS: Shall I finish about the diplomatic passport?

Q: Yes, please.

BRIGGS: I remember that when we were in Prague, after the Communists forced out a large part of my husband's embassy staff and they were left with twelve people and the ambassador, my husband insisted that every American in the embassy have a diplomatic passport. There was some little difficulty with - who was it - Mrs. Shipley who had the passport office then. But he managed to persuade her, I think with help from various other people in the Department. And everybody had a diplomatic passport. Now about Prague.

Q: Yes. And the Polish ambassador.

BRIGGS: And the Polish ambassador. A very nice new Polish ambassador arrived who I think had been a journalist in Poland and who spoke very good English. His wife was away. But we had a party to which he was invited. He was the ranking guest so he was sitting beside me. I heard say something about wanting to make an indiscreet remark so I said to him, "What is your indiscreet remark?" He said, "I notice I'm the only person here from the other side of the so-called Iron Curtain. Now my indiscreet remark is, am I the only person invited, or the only one who accepted?" I said, "You're the only one who was invited because I've called on the Romanian wife who is out of town now. I've called on the Bulgarian wife who has not returned my call, and the Russian wife has never given me an appointment to call on her." He said, "Let me interrupt. She's never received my wife either."

Q: That's wonderful.



BRIGGS: Then later, sometime later, we went to a cocktail party given probably in one of the non-Communist countries which were being courted by the Communists. And the Prague government... People always went to those parties early and left early so as not to meet the non-Communists, I've no doubt. So we went early, too, just to see them and make them nervous. I went up to the Polish ambassador and said, "Mr. Ambassador, I've just discovered that in nature there are two definite Communist groups - the ants and the bees. Each one works according to its ability and is rewarded according to what it has done, and they all live together happily for the state." He said, "Let me interrupt you. Are they happy?"

Q: That is marvelous.

BRIGGS: I had no answer.

Q: Before we end, I'd like to talk a little bit more about the residence in Prague. Yesterday we wondered what happens to that house now? Does the American government own it, or does the Petschek family own it?

BRIGGS: That is a question. Well I had not really been properly warned about it, although I think somebody must have mentioned how big it was. But it was certainly the biggest house I've ever lived in or ever could live in - an enormous building. It was built in a kind of huge semi-circle with the inside of the curve toward the garden. Downstairs there was a huge room facing on the garden which was almost two stories high and had glass doors held in place by bronze fixings that, when a button was pressed, went down into the floor leaving the whole wall open. The curve upstairs went past all the bedrooms and there was a beautiful carpet that covered the entire floor upstairs and flowed down the big staircase. Unhappily, the previous ambassador had a dog which had left its mark on the carpet, very sad.

When you came into the building, there was an entrance at the right where one could hang coats. Across from that there was another entrance to the left which went into a smallish, comparatively small drawing room. That was later on where we held the church services with lay leaders when we had no minister, or with the Anglican minister who came in from Vienna occasionally. Furthermore, downstairs, on the right side of that huge room with the glass doors, was a huge dining room. The table could hold - I forget - thirty people? More than that?

Q: Oh I think you had something like seventy once. It was huge.

BRIGGS: Seventy maybe? Even occasionally we took down that table and had small tables around the edge of the room. That was fun, too. Then going in the other direction, there was a small room which had bookcases in it full of books.



Q: The library.

BRIGGS: A library. And then beyond that was another enormous drawing room. It was really incredibly large.

Q: And a railroad train.

BRIGGS: Underneath in the cellar was a little railroad track which had been built to bring the coal in for the furnaces. There also were quantities of storerooms on either side full of things which had been left by the Petschek family who had left quickly. They were Germanic in ancestry and they were also Jewish and were terrified when the Nazis began to come into Czechoslovakia. So they very sensibly got out. But they left quantities of things behind, including a great deal of beautiful pink meissen.

Q: What do you suppose has happened to all that, not necessarily to the meissen. I think that went to the White House. But the belongings all these years.

BRIGGS: I don't know. Then up in the attic. There were quantities of things up there. It was a story we were told that one of the Petscheks had been told by a soothsayer or something that he would live as long as he kept rebuilding his house. Whether that story was true or not I don't know, but it was obvious that he was constantly making repairs, changes to it. Because the house was built on a curve, there were triangular spaces in the wall between the rooms which must have been the perfect place to put microphones. And we actually had the house checked every now and then to see if there were microphones, and they never found any, but I've no doubt that there were. We were very careful always what we said.

Q: Well and in those days we had the radio - we didn't have television - we kept the radio up - going all the time.

BRIGGS: That helped a great deal. I remember when I had a chance to call on the then wife of the president, she had a radio going on all the time. I only went once. She only asked me to come once, but she did ask me once.

Q: Mrs. Gottwaldova?

BRIGGS: No, not the president, the widow of Benes.



Q: Benes. The last prime minister of free Czechoslovakia. When the Communists came in.

BRIGGS: I remember that our military attaché's apartment was found to have a microphone in their bedroom. It was decided that it would be left there so he could give them false information.

Q: That's wonderful.

BRIGGS: The man who was the caretaker was named Pokorny. He had been there before. He lived in a house at the corner of the gate. He was the one who used to press the button when we wanted those great doors let down into the floor.

Q: Remember his story of his digging up this pink meissen that he'd buried in the garden?

BRIGGS: Yes. (laughs) Another story was that the Nazis took everything they wanted out of the house, but they didn't bother to go up in the attic. That was another story. Whether it was true or not, I don't know. There were a lot of tales that we heard. Because we went just as the break between the people of Czechoslovakia and the American Embassy had occurred. Up to that point, there had been people who knew the Americans in the embassy and invited them to their houses. But it got so dangerous that it became impossible for people to do that. I remember I needed some special shoes and I was taken by one of the servants to a place where they made them and got some very satisfactory footwear. I later heard that the elevator man had reported this to the police and the shoemaker had been arrested.

Q: Any contact really.

BRIGGS: Any contact. Unless their person was registered as someone who would report what was going on.

The thing that was interesting about the Petschek Palace was that there had been a second great palace over by the Petscheks which was at that time the Russian Embassy.

Q: Now, were these brothers, these Petscheks?

BRIGGS: I don't know. I'm not sure.



Q: Two Petschek families.

BRIGGS: Two Petschek houses in any case. When we first got there, there were two Masaryk sisters there and both of them came to see us. Fortunately, they both safely got out. I'm wrong, there was only one there. The other one I saw in Switzerland perhaps? I know she was living in Switzerland. I think the other one came to this country. No I'm wrong, I think they were both there. I remember saying, "Do you think you should come to see me?" Whoever it was replied, "I can go anywhere I like in Prague." I think I told you about the doctor who put the bandage on my hand?

Q: The Penfield's dog? Yes, yes.

BRIGGS: Another case of a doctor that I went to for another reason: I remember being very perturbed while I was in his office because he said things about the Communist government which I thought should not be said out loud. But I couldn't say, "Are you sure you're not being overheard?" You almost had to be silent.

Q: The Hungarians were extraordinary about this. They just dared to do an awful lot of things that they got away with... People would come up to you in restaurants and sit down and talk to you and you'd think, "Go away. Don't deal with us in public." But they didn't care somehow.

BRIGGS: Of course it was in Prague where we made the strongest friendships. In other posts, it was important to get to know the people of the country. You were friendly with your diplomatic colleagues and you saw them at parties and invited them to parties, but you didn't spend your life with them. But in Prague, with the communists just having taken over the government and the Czechs being truly afraid - with reason - of being seen with non-communists, our non-communist diplomatic colleagues became our very good friends.

Q: And we spent a lot more time with the staff of the Embassy, too.

BRIGGS: That's right! So over those years I made friends from many countries I never would have known as well, and very special friendships with our own Embassy staff. (phone rings - pause)



I'd like to talk about the many schools the children went to with our frequent assignments. Lucy learned to read in Cuba but her first real school was in Washington. From there we went to Chile and the children were in English-speaking schools there. Then we were transferred back to Cuba. There they went to Cuban schools where they both got a sound basis in Spanish. Then in 1944 my husband was appointed Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, but was sent off to Chungking after only eight months there, so for the spring months the children and I went back to Cuba. Ted went back into his Cuban school and Lucy went to an American high school. This was during the spring of 1945.

Ellis kept urging me to join him in Chungking, and while I was not at all sure I would be allowed to go, I reluctantly arranged to have my son live with my sister in Illinois and my daughter go to a Quaker boarding school in Long Island, not too far from my parents. None of this was necessary, of course, with the war coming to an end in September, but not knowing what was coming next, we kept to these plans in the fall of 1945.

Fortunately we were assigned to Washington again - the third time - and the children were in day schools there from the fall of 1946 to the spring of 1948, but once more adjustments had to be made. Ellis was sent as Ambassador to Uruguay in the fall of 1947. In order not to move the children again, our son lived with the Merriams, his aunt and uncle, and Lucy lived with our good Foreign Service friends, the Baxters. In the fall of 1948, Lucy went to college and our son to a boarding school where he was very happy.

It was hard to leave the children behind, but I had been impressed years before by a Brazilian diplomat who had been the son of a Brazilian diplomat and brought up only in foreign countries. As a result, he had left his son home in Brazil with his grandfather, so that he would really be a Brazilian.

Q: There is an importance in the enriching life of moving around, but there's an importance in having some kind of roots in one's own country.

BRIGGS: Yes, Ted would have been an entirely different person if he had spent all his school days in countries other than his own.

Both our children learned Spanish in Cuba, in Cuban schools, but their vocabularies were essentially children's, and when they visited us in Uruguay in what was of course the happily mild Uruguayan winters, they had a chance to bring their knowledge of Spanish to a more adult level. Ted made friends with a Uruguayan boy, a Colombian and a Chilean. Their lingua franca was Spanish. Lucy had the same experience with friends. I do think it is important for American children to learn another language, while keeping English as their dominant language.



Q: And to have their beginning schooling in their mother tongue is very important.

BRIGGS: That's right, but actually Ted didn't. His first schooling was in Spanish, but we always spoke English at home. There seemed to be no problem.

Q: They had two languages, which turned them into linguists. That was certainly true in my family.

BRIGGS: Yes it did. Americans don't appreciate that, how easily a child can learn another language and how, once learned, the accent is always remembered.

From the time we went to Uruguay we followed the same pattern: the children were home in school and college through the school terms and visited us wherever we were in the summer.

Q: Well this has been perfectly wonderful for me. And I hope that we may continue on? Maybe not another year, but maybe next spring. Think of other things that you'd like to get down on the record.

BRIGGS: All right. If I think of it, I'll let you know.

Q: Thank you so much.

BRIGGS: I've enjoyed seeing you so much Pat.

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## BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Ellis Ormsbee Briggs

Spouse Entered Service: 1925Left Service: 1962 You Entered Service: 1928Left Service: 1962

Status: Widow of AEP, mother of 2 FS children, mother of 2 FSOs.

Spouse's Position: FSO from Vice-Consul to Ambassador (7 posts). Appointed to Spain, but illness forced retirement.



Place/Date of birth: New York, New York (Mount Morris Park) March 8, 1903

Maiden Name: Barnard

Parents (Name, Profession):

Everett Larkin Barnard, lawyer, Church E. Gates Lumber Co., New York

Therina Townsend Barnard

Schools (Prep, University): New Rochelle, New York High School; Smith College, 1925

Date and Place of Marriage: May 26, 1928; New Rochelle, New York

Profession: Wife of Foreign Service Officer

Children:

Lucy Therina Briggs

Everett Ellis Briggs

Honors: Scroll from Mayor of Seoul for war widows/orphans work.

End of interview